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BRIEFING PAPER FOR THE PRESIDENT'S PRESS CONFERENCE

MAY 8, 1963

SUBJECT: SOVIET TROOPS IN CUBA

QUESTION:

What has, or is being done by whatever means to encourage or demand their ultimate withdrawal?

CURRENT SITUATION REPORT:

- * The US note of April 3 to the USSR contained the following statement:

"In taking vigorous action to prevent misuse of its territory, Government of the United States trusts that the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics will not misinterpret such action as indicating any change in United States opposition to Soviet military involvement in Cuba."

- * The President in his news conference of April 3, 1963 made the following statement:

"Well, we estimate that 5,000 Soviet troops left in November, immediately with the missiles, and with the bombers. And we estimate that in the last month approximately 4,000 Soviets have left. If we accept the figure which was always a rough calculation that there were 21,000, 22,000, Soviets there at the height of the crisis, we could get some idea of where approximately we think the figures are today. ..."

- * On April 24, the President stated:

"I have already said the best information we have from the intelligence community, and I rely upon the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency as chairman of the intergovernmental intelligence community for the information which I have given publicly. We attempt to ask any Congressman or Senator who has information to the contrary for his sources so they can be evaluated. I have stated that our information was, I think the last time we met, that 4,000, we thought, left in March, and that no substantial number had come in this winter. There is some evidence that some have left in April, but not a large number. Of course, the equipment itself seems to still be there, however, so that I would think there has been some reduction this winter in the number of Russian personnel on the island. There has not been a substantial reduction in the equipment.

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There has been no evidence, however, of any substantial introduction. It is not, in my opinion, a great question as to whether there is 17,000, 15,000, 13,000. There are still important elements, still on the island, and there is still Soviet equipment still on the island. So I don't think Senator Keating and I are debating a serious question, unless there is a challenge on one side or the other of good faith, and I am sure there isn't. It is our best information that 4,000 or 5,000 have left since January, and that there has not been an equal number come in. In fact, much, much less, 300 or 400 at the most. That is our best evidence and I repeat it as it has been gathered by our intelligence sources."

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* Approximately 1,000 left in the first part of April. Since the last President's Press Conference, April 24, no Soviet troops have left Cuba according to the best available information. Since we cannot identify the units to which departing troops belonged (they have been seen only in civilian clothes boarding ship or on board) and since we have detected no sizeable equipment removal during 1963, we have no reliable means of estimating the current dispositions of Soviet troops in Cuba. We continue to believe, however, that no major component of the Soviet military establishment in Cuba has been completely dismantled during 1963 or turned over to the Cubans.

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SUGGESTED REPLY:

- * Our insistence upon the removal of Soviet troops from Cuba is well known to the Soviet Government.
- * So far the Soviets have removed approximately 10,000 troops, and we trust that, in due course, the withdrawal will be completed.